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— OR THE —

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A Story for Young and Old.

BY FRANK H. CONVERSE,

AUTHOR OF "PIPPERS ADAMS," "BLOWN OUT
TO SEA," "YACHT CAPTAIN," ETC.

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CHAPTER IX.—CONTINUED.

Tad knew nothing about playing a
trout, and if he had it would have made
no difference, owing to his primitive
fishing tackle. He pulled vigorously;
so did the trout, and "snap" went the
end of the other pole, leaving Tad in a
mad frenzy of excitement, with three-
fourths of the rod in his hands, dancing
madly on the rocks.

Joe was equal to the situation.
Dropping his own pole, he made a dive
for the broken fragment, which was
floating in sight. Gathering the slack
carefully in his hands, a vigorous
tug landed high and dry the largest
trout ever caught in Mill brook.

"There!" Joe exclaimed, as Tad re-
garded his prize in an amazement too
deep for words, "you've caught the one
real trout you're wanted to—now, I
guess you'd better be getting home,
without doing any more fishing."

"All right," returned Tad, mourn-
fully, "but you caught him, after all,
Joe." But Joe stoutly asserted that
Tad looked him first, while he—Joe—
only helped to bring the big fish safe to
land. And, in the discussion of the ex-
citing episode, the walk home was ac-
complished in a surprisingly short time.

Tad's big trout was baked for sup-
per, and it was generally agreed by the
four who partook thereof that the flavor
was particularly fine. Tad himself se-
cretly thought he had never eaten any-
thing so delicious in his whole life. But it
is not unlikely that the knowl-
edge that he himself had furnished this
important adjunct to the evening meal
gave it an additional relish for Tad.

By this time Tad had begun to feel
very much at ease with these quiet,
home-like people. As they gathered
about the open fire-place, with its
smouldering log-burner, after the tea-
things were cleared away, and the big
kerosene-lamp was lighted, he opened
his heart to their kindly questioning
and spoke freely of his past life. There
was really little or nothing to keep
back, for, as I have said, thanks to the
memory of his mother's teachings and a
natural uprightness of character, Tad
had escaped the evil ways which a
homeless, friendless boy is apt to fall
into, and, though he had found abun-
dantly, he was, on the whole, a
more upright young fellow than many
whose surroundings and advantages
had been far more favorable than
Tad's.

"So you're to begin ship's duties to-
morrow, is that so?" Monday—Tad re-
marked the Captain, thoughtfully, to
break a little silence which had fallen
upon the group.

"Yes, sir," was the reply, "and I
do hope she'll like me."

"She'll be hard to suit if she don't,"
retorted Mrs. Flagg, clicking her net-
ties emphatically together, as they
flashed in and out of the meshes of a
blue yarn sock that she was knitting
for the Captain. For the good lady,
whose heart was large enough to take
in at least half a dozen motherless boys
and girls, had begun to regard Tad
with considerable favor.

"I know she'll like you," said Polly,
confidently, as she looked up from the
fascinating pages of "Little Women,"
which she was reading for the first time,
while Bounce slumbered peacefully in
her lap.

"You just go on and do your duty
tomorrow, and you'll see," said the
Captain, gravely, "and you needn't
have no fears. Miss Smith," he con-
tinued, turning to the girl, "is a female
that's had a tempestuous y'g'e in
life, as it were, losing of every rela-
tion, and which has come to make
her a little bit of a God-fearer; but she's
good-hearted and God-fearing, and once
you get her books, you're always there."

"They say she's got a han'some prop-
erty that her folks left her—some-
where high ten thousand dollars," Mrs.
Flagg observed, in a voice indicative of
considerable respect for the possessor
of such wealth. For in Bixport the
person with an unnumbered estate
and a thousand dollars was "well-to-
do"; while the owner of ten thousand
dollars was regarded in the light of a
millionaire.

CHAPTER X.
On the following morning, when
Tad, having opened his eyes to the
glad sunlight streaming in at the
east window of his little room, began
to pull his drowsy ideas together, he
remembered that it was Sunday.

"They'll want me to go to church,
and I don't look decent," thought Tad,
disconsolately with a glance in the di-
rection of the chair where he had
placed his threadbare clothing the
night before.

But what was this? A partly worn
suit of serviceable tweed cloth—the
very counterpart of that in which Joe
Whitney was arrayed when he sprang
about the "Mary J.," hung over the
chair-back. And that was all. In the
chair itself lay all the other essen-
tials of a boy's toilet, neatly folded,
even to a coarse white linen collar, a
whisk of black neck-ribbon, a pair of
but little used lace-up boots, and a
"second-best" straw hat.

Scarcely able to believe the evidence
of his astonished eyes, Tad slipped out
of bed and proceeded to investigate.
On the top of the pile was a bit of pa-
per, wherein, in an irregular, boyish
scrawl, were written the words: "To pay
for makin' Miss Smith think you was
dead and playin' a bare—J. White-
ney."

After Tad had gone to bed on the

previous evening, Mrs. Flagg slipped
over to Deacon Whitney's, and ad-
vised him of the special pleadings of
Joe, succeeded in enlisting the full sym-
pathies of the family in behalf of shab-
bily-dressed Tad. Joe's wardrobe was
overhauled, and a selection made, re-
sulting in the surprise to Tad which I
have mentioned.

"Well, he's what I call a nice-look-
ing boy," was Mrs. Flagg's inward
comment. Tad, with hair neatly
combed and face and hands scrubbed
till they fairly shone, came shyly down-
stairs dressed in his new suit.

Polly smiled upon him approvingly;
the Captain remarked that he didn't
know about taking such a dandified-
looking chap to church along of such
plain-dressed folks as the Flagg family;
and Mrs. Flagg gave him a motherly
kiss.

"That's so much like Joe," laughed
Polly, as the display of the paper which
Tad had found with his little gift
necessitated an explanation of Joe's
previous performances.

"Always remember," Tad coun-
seled the Captain, with a grave shake
of the head, as they sat down to the
table together, "what Solomon says
about a wise son makin' a glad father
—and—and he that is not warned
thereby is not wise," concluded Captain
Flagg, who was sometimes a little hazy
in the recollection of his quotations.

After breakfast, the Captain read a
chapter from the New Testament aloud,
making comments upon the text, for
the edification of Tad and Polly, who
listened with respectful attention. And
then, after awhile, at the summons of
the rather unimpaired church-bell,
the whole family devoutly made their
way to the meeting-house, close by.

The Bixporters were, generally speak-
ing, a church-going people; and, on the
pleasant April morning of which I
speak, the church was well filled.

To Tad's secret joy, Deacon Whit-
ney's pew was next Captain Flagg's,
and soon he had the extreme satisfac-
tion of seeing Joe filing in ahead of his
sister, followed by Mrs. Whitney and
the deacon. Joe sat at the extreme
end, and thus the two boys were divided
only by the slight partition between
the pews.

Joe greeted Tad with a wink, and
clasping his hands together, rolled his
eyes upward, as though in rapturous
astonishment at Tad's festive appear-
ance.

"I think you're just as good as you
can be, and I wish I had something to
give you!" whispered Tad, warmly.
"Not, dear's all right," returned Joe,
shrugging his shoulders carelessly, and
a whispered conversation ensued, which
was only checked by the entrance of
the minister; whereat Joe, duly admon-
ished by a poke of his sister's fan, and

glanced of mild rebuke from the de-
acon, slipped into a temporary abeyance,
with his hands being plunged
deeply into his pockets and his eyes
fixed steadfastly upon good Mr. Allen.

But I am sorry to say, Joe's thoughts
were by no means in keeping with the
place. He was cherishing and even
planning, a dire revenge on un-
conscious Samantha Nason—who sat di-
rectly in front of him in Miss Smith's
pew—for what he called her "tattling"
of the previous day.

The service proceeded in the good
old-fashioned way peculiar to country
churches. All denominations wor-
shipped under the same roof, and Mr.
Allen's words were but a plain and
simple talk about the lessons taught by
One who once walked upon earth, and
spoke as never man spoke. There was
very much in it that Tad perfectly un-
derstood, and, as he listened, a dim de-
sire to fashion his young life after the
teachings of the great Master began to
take form in his mind. True, it was
only embodied in the simple thought,
"I'll try to be a better boy," yet from
such beginnings oftentimes comes the
real success of a true Christian life.

And when the sermon closed Tad felt
that he should never be tired of listen-
ing to a minister who made things as
plain as did Mr. Allen.

Now, it was Samantha Nason's in-
vincible habit to sit through the singing,
while the others rose. "I work hard
all the week, and I'm going to make
Sunday my day of rest," said Samu-
el once, a little defiantly, "an' I guess
I can worship the Lord as well settin'
down as standin' up."

As the closing hymn was being sung,
Tad noticed that Joe, who all through
the service had kept his right hand
persistently in his pocket, slowly with-
drew it, though without removing his
eyes from the pages of the hymn-book,
and, seemingly holding something in
his grasp, slipped his closed hand gently
along the ledge of the pew before
him, till it was in close proximity to
the back of Miss Nason's neck. Then
he stole a sly glance in the direction of
his father and mother, who were too
intent upon following the words of the
hymn (in which their daughter Nellie's
voice arose as clear and sweet as the
notes of a woodland bird) to notice the
movements of their son. Slowly Joe's
fingers unfolded, and after a moment
his hand stole back to a place beside it
follow.

"Now what is he up to?" thought
Tad, fastened by the shadowy grin on
Joe's features. And, following the
direction of his friend's eyes, Tad's an-
swering question was answered. Clun-
sily clambering over the back of the
pew, Tad stole about Miss Nason's neck
was a brown wood-beetle, as big as
the end of Tad's little finger. But he
here he could decide what to do Miss

Nason bonneted to her feet with a stifled
exclamation, and clutched frantically
at her back hair. Unfortunately she
caught hold of the innocent beetle in-
stead, and, giving vent to a shrill
scream that made the rafters of the
house ring, she threw it violently from
her, to the great consternation of
every one in the house, many of whom
imagined Miss Nason had discovered a
mouse in the pew.

Mr. Allen pronounced the benedi-
ction and dismissed his congregation.
And naughty Joe Whitney, holding his
cap before his face, choked and gasped,
in the agonies of suppressed laughter,
all the way to the door.

CHAPTER XI.
The promise of April had given
place to the fulfillments of June, filling
the air with summer sunshine and
heat. Tad, under the supervision of
Miss Smith, whose angular features
were shaded by an immense garden-
hat, was wedding the pansy-bed in the
front yard. Miss Smith, who was a
great flower-lover, made somewhat of
a specialty of cultivating sweet-peas
and pansies, which she gave away in
their season with a liberal hand.

You would hardly have recognized
Tad in the brown-faced boy, in blue
overalls, bending lovingly over the
quaint, upturned flower-faces that
peered into his own. He had taken to
his new vocation with surprising readi-
ness, and Miss Smith warmly con-
gratulated herself on having at last found
a boy after her own heart, though she
seldom allowed her satisfaction to show
itself in the form of words.

"Here comes that Forrest chap
again," muttered Miss Smith, discon-
tentedly, as she glanced toward a
distantly-dressed young man, who was
sauntering along the elm-shaded
street; "I wish he'd kept away about
his own business, and not come idling
round, taking your attention off'n your
work."

For Mr. Paul Forrest was one of John
Doty's city boarders, who had scraped
an acquaintance with Tad very soon
after coming to Bixport. He seemed to
take a singular interest in Tad, which,
as he explained to Miss Smith, arose
from the boy's strong resem-
blance to his youngest and only brother,
who had died a year previous—the
last one, excepting several of a family
of seven," he said, with a sad smile.

For Mr. Forrest did a great deal of
smiling, first and last; and, curious
enough, Tad, in some vague way, was
reminded by it of the genial Mr. Jones,
whom he had met in Boston, before
coming to Bixport. Of course, this
was simply an absurd fancy on his
part. The fraudulent Jones was a
smooth-faced young man, with gold-
pointed teeth—while Mr. Paul Forrest
sporting a very glossy black mustache,
that had a purplish tinge in certain
lights, and the whitest and most even
teeth in the neighborhood, were on his
dentist's establishment; neither was a
little bluish scar visible upon Mr.
Forrest's white forehead, that Tad had
noticed upon the intellectual brow of
Jones. Yet, all the same, he often un-
consciously connected the two in his
mind, even while he laughed at his
own folly in so doing.

"Miss Smith, good-morning—Tad,
my boy, how are you?" exclaimed Mr.
Forrest, with his effusive smile, as he
bounced lightly up the garden-path, and
with a coolness peculiar to himself, sat
down on the edge of the garden piazza.

Miss Smith, stillly acknowledged the
greeting, and Tad, glancing up shyly,
said he was pretty well. He was a lit-
tle flattered by Mr. Forrest's evident
interest in himself—though he was not
quite sure that he liked it, after all. He
had nothing in common with the city-
bred gentleman, and was rather sur-
prised to know what Mr. Forrest could
have in common with himself.

"Come into the house after you get
through weeding, Tad; I want you,"
said Miss Smith, stalking past the un-
happily Mr. Forrest, who sat quite at
his ease, with the ivory head of his cane
between his lips.

"You're the meek reply, and
Tad silently continued his work, wish-
ing that Mr. Forrest would go, for he
was very well aware that Miss Smith
did not at all approve of the gentle-
man's frequent visitations.

In a small village like Bixport, where
every body's business is public prop-
erty, the story of Tad and his traveling
sachel was generally known, as was
also the fact that no attention had ever
been paid to Captain Flagg's advertise-
ment. So it was not strange that Mr.
Forrest should be in possession of the
same knowledge. He had referred to
the matter casually in conversation
with Tad, declaring that it was a mighty
interesting incident in real life—come,
now!

"So you never opened the little al-
ligator-skin sachel, to see what was in
it—eh, Tad?" suddenly asked Mr. For-
rest, after a short pause.

"Well, no, sir! I haven't a key—
and, if I had, I don't think it would
be just the thing, either," replied Tad,
a little surprised at the unexpected ques-
tion.

"Oh, I don't know," remarked Mr.
Forrest, coolly; "there might be some-
thing in it that would give you a clew
to the real case."

"That's true," murmured Tad, who
had never thought of this before.

"I think it's your duty to try and
open it," continued Mr. Forrest, seeing
the impression he had made.

"But I couldn't without breaking the
lock, and I don't want to do that," Tad
answered, with a perplexed look.

"I suppose you keep it in your pos-
session?" inquired Mr. Forrest, care-
lessly; and Tad nodded. "Then, why
not bring the bag over to my room this
evening—I dare say some of my keys
will unlock it," suggested the gentle-
man, blandly.

"I'll think about it, sir," replied Tad,
cautiously, for he was not quite sure
that it would be just the right thing to
do; and, moreover, he wanted to ask
the advice of Miss Smith, in whose
good judgment Tad had the firmest con-
fidence, before taking any such decisive
step.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

"I will not write any more," said
a friend in closing her letter, "for
there is a spelling in the kitchen
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